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The Politics of EU Accession: Ideology, Party Strategy and the European Question in Hungary , by A. Batory

Reviewed by E Butler

With the five-year anniversary of the EU's 2004 eastern enlargement approaching, there is renewed interest in the new Member States, with a number of books due for publication over the coming year. As such, Agnes Batory's book is a timely publication which, now that the 'dust' of the 'big bang' enlargement has settled, leads the way in demystifying the politics of EU accession in the new Member States.

Batory provides us with a competent analysis of the attitudes Hungarian political parties have held on the notion of Europe and the EU from the early transition period through to the successful referendum on Hungary's accession to the EU in 2003. A number of questions are dealt with in this analysis, including what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book – how Europe and EU accession influenced inter-party relations and coalition building.

The book is divided into eight chapters with a separate introduction and conclusion. There is a logical division between the chapters, with chapter 1 providing a clear outline of the conceptual framework Batory employs. Chapters 2 and 3 provide some of the historical background on the development of the political party system in Hungary and of the various political parties in terms of their formation and ideological development. Chapters 4 and 5 deal primarily with public attitudes towards Europe and its influence upon the relationship between the political parties and their electoral base. Chapters 6 and 7 look at the issue in terms of how it has impacted on government in Hungary, focusing on the contest between parties in government and those in opposition and the relationship between parties in government coalition. Finally, chapter 8 looks back at the referendum on EU accession with a detailed examination of the campaigns, and the main arguments for and against accession, as well as the final outcome of the referendum in light of the low turnout (45.62 per cent).

This book is a welcome addition and will be useful to a variety of groups, including those with an interest in EU enlargement, political parties or Hungarian studies. While Batory is quite clear from the beginning that the book is a study of only the accession period, the reader cannot help but feel a little short-changed that, in fact, the book only provides the first half of the story, particularly in light of what has happened since 2004. As Batory proves, EU accession was an undoubted ideological driving force for Hungary's political parties, but how has this changed post-2004? Does it have the same influence on party development, or are other issues, such as nationalism, becoming even more prevalent? Putting a positive spin on this sense of disappointment, Batory has set a standard and her book provides a clear background and framework for the development of a wider research agenda.